

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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SUBJ: SRI LANKAN POLICY ON COMMODITIES

REF: (A) COLOMBO 1119 (NOTAL); (B) 77 COLOMBO 3105

1. PRIOR TO THE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT, SRI LANKA'S POLICIES ON INTERNATIONAL COMMODITY AGREEMENTS (PRINCIPALLY TEA, RUBBER, AND HARD FIBERS) AND THE COMMON FUND WERE FORMULATED ALMOST ENTIRELY BY LEELANANDA DE SILVA WHO WAS SENIOR ADDITIONAL SECRETARY IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS. AFTER TAKING OFFICE IN JULY 1977, THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA (GSL) SLOWLY BEGAN TO DISMANTLE THIS MINISTRY, FINALLY ABOLISHING IT ALTOGETHER AND SHIFTING MOST OF ITS FUNCTIONS TO THE FINANCE MINISTRY TO CREATE THE NEW MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND PLANNING.

2. DE SILVA, WHO WAS CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH THE PREVIOUS GSL, FOUND HIMSELF OUT OF A JOB WHEN THIS BUREAUCRATIC SHUFFLE WAS COMPLETED. HE EVENTUALLY ENDED UP AS ECONOMIC ADVISOR

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IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANTATION INDUSTRIES WHERE IT WAS THOUGHT HE WOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY A PROMINENT ROLE IN MAKING COMMODITY POLICY. HE FOUND THIS WAS NOT THE CASE, HOWEVER, AND HAS NOW TAKEN A TWO-YEAR LEAVE OF ABSENCE TO WORK FOR THE INTER-NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES IN NYON, SWITZERLAND. (NOTE FOR GENEVA: AS YOU NO DOUBT KNOW, DE SILVA IS AN ABLE ECONOMIST WHO HAS BEEN VERY COOPERATIVE

WITH USG OFFICIALS. WHILE HE IS A STRONG ADVOCATE OF UNCTAD POSITIONS, HE IS A REASONABLE PERSON AND WELL WORTH CULTIVATING. HE WILL VERY LIKELY REAPPEAR ON THE SRI LANKAN SCENE AT SOME FUTURE DATE, AND THE EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE MISSION OFFICIALS KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH HIM.)

3. WITH DE SILVA'S DEPARTURE IT IS DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE WHO IS IN CHARGE OF FORMULATING SRI LANKA'S COMMODITY POLICIES. THE MINISTRIES OF FINANCE AND PLANNING, TRADE, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AND PLANTATION INDUSTRIES ALL HAVE OFFICIALS WHO ARE WORKING ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF COMMODITY POLICY. HOWEVER, THERE DOES NOT SEEM TO BE ANY COORDINATING BODY, AND EACH MINISTRY APPARS TO BE OPERATING IN ISOLATION. WHILE THERE IS A COMMITTEE OF DEVELOPMENT SECRETARIES FROM THERE AND A FEW OTHER MINISTRIES, THE FUNCTION OF THIS BODY IS TO COORDINATE INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, AND IT NORMALLY DOES NOT CONCERN ITSELF WITH EXTERNAL MATTERS OTHER THAN DIRECT AID FLOWS.

4. IN THE PRESENT SITUATION, IT IS LIKELY THAT POLICY WILL BE MADE ON AN AD HOC BASIS BY SRI LANKAN DELEGATES TO INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS ON COMMODITY ISSUES. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT SRI LANKA WILL DEVIATE FROM THE STANDARD UNCTAD LINE.

WRIGGINS

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